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Okanagan water board hoping for plenty of precipitation

While drought levels in B.C. drop, board encourages indoor conservation from Okanagan residents



Roger Knox

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Okanagan mayors celebrate the City of Armstrong's sixth win as Okanagan Basin Water Board's Make Water Work Community Champions. Accepting for Armstrong is Coun. Shirley Fowler (centre), accepting congratulations from Lake Country Mayor Blair Ireland (from left), Vernon Mayor Victor Cumming, Spallumcheen Mayor Christine Fraser, and Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff. (Contributed)

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) continues to watch drought levels closely as residents begin to put their gardens to bed.

Rain over the past few weeks has helped move the province's drought level for the Okanagan from 5, as of Sept. 28, to a current Level 2.

"The fact that irrigation season is over and there is less demand for water has also helped," said OBWB communications director Corinne Jackson. "That said, a number of local creeks have remained at higher drought levels due to low flows which has made them impassable to fish. Some metered groundwater stations are also still showing as below normal levels."

The province uses a six-level classification system to rate drought levels, impacts and response, where 0 indicates enough water to meet socio-economic and ecosystem needs, and 5, where adverse impacts are almost certain.

"We need to see significant precipitation this fall and winter to help groundwater supplies and reservoirs bounce back. If this doesn't happen, we could begin the 2024 irrigation season in drought," Jackson said, noting residents and water managers may need to make choices about where water is best used.

Since 2012, the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise public outreach program has run Make Water Work, a valley-wide outdoor residential water conservation campaign (MakeWaterWork.ca) to raise awareness for water in the region and help address the second largest use of water in the valley.

The campaign runs May to October, when competition for water is highest. But as drought continues and the Okanagan is expected to experience a warmer and drier winter due to El Niño, the importance of avoiding water waste remains important.

As such, the WaterWise program will be turning its attention to encouraging indoor water conservation and helping residents plan and prepare landscapes to be more water efficient and meet the needs of a healthy ecosystem.

In wrapping up the 2023 Make Water Work campaign, two lucky Okanagan residents have each won \$500 toward a WaterWise yard upgrade: Shannan Machulski from West Kelowna and Ken De Grott of Vernon.

In addition to the \$500 prize winners, the City of Armstrong was awarded the Make Water Work Community Champion title this year, having collected the most pledges per capita. The city's win was acknowledged in September, as part of the OBWB's annual meeting.

The Make Water Work campaign is delivered in partnership with Okanagan local governments and utilities, as well as several garden centre and irrigation businesses. A special thanks goes out to partners including: Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong, Nicholas Alexander Landscaping and Swan Lake Market and Garden in Vernon, Ace Hardware in Lake Country, Kel-Lake Garden Centre, Wild Bloom Nursery and ProSource Irrigation in Kelowna, GardenWorks in Penticton, Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos, and the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.

To learn more about the work of the OBWB and water research visit www.OBWB.ca, and for water conservation and protection information visit www.OkWaterWise.ca.